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NEWS FEATURES A LOOK BACK SCRUBBING IN I AM NAVY MEDICINE

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Independent Duty Corpsman – A Specialized Lifesaver

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By Matt Lyman, U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery Public Affairs

Independent Duty Corpsmen (IDCs) are specialized hospital corpsmen who aspire to reach the pinnacle of Navy Medicine.

These Sailors serve on land or at sea alongside Navy and Marine Corps warfighters, and at isolated duty stations where no medical officer is assigned.

IDCs fulfill a variety of critical duties in support of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps mission. They serve as clinical or specialty technicians in more than 38 occupational specialties, including key administrative roles at military treatment facilities around the world.

IDCs are assistants in the treatment and prevention of disease, and serve side-by-side with medical officers, doctors, dentists and nurses. They can be found aboard ships and submarines, or ashore throughout the United States and abroad.

They are also assigned to specific Navy warfare communities, including surface, submarine or Fleet Marine Force IDCs.

"The position of Independent Duty Corpsman is one of the most responsible and challenging enlisted assignments in the armed forces. Whether performing minor surgeries below the sea, steaming to provide humanitarian assistance in distant waters or rendering emergency care on the battlefield, IDCs play an integral role in the success of Navy Medicine," said Master Chief Hospital Corpsman Blake West, U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery IDC program manager.

The scope of an IDC's responsibility extends beyond providing hands-on medical care and includes providing advice and counsel to senior leaders.

"It takes a particular type of Sailor, and a specific type of corpsman to fulfill the role of IDC," said West.

"After witnessing the IDC on my first ship flawlessly triage patients during the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, I realized a call to serve as an IDC and as a Navy Medicine leader," said Chief Hospital Corpsman Mercedes R. Sawin, USS Ross (DDG 71) senior medical department representative.

Specific training is required for IDCs to operate in the various units and locations at which they are typically assigned.

All IDCs attend a 19-week school at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Following basic training, IDCs must attend additional schools located in North Carolina, Connecticut and California in order to qualify in a warfare specialty.



Chief Hospital Corpsman Reyes Camacho, right, checks the heartbeat of Machinist's Mate 3rd Class Rudy Taylor, left, aboard the Los Angeles class attack submarine USS Toledo (SSN 769), Dec. 15. Submarine Force Independent Duty

Corpsmen are the sole medical professionals permanently assigned to submarine crews.

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- January 2015
- December 2014
- November 2014
- September 2014
- August 2014
- July 2014
- June 2014
- May 2014
- April 2014
- March 2014
- February 2014
- January 2014
- December 2013
- November 2013
- October 2013

Categories

- A LOOK BACK
- FEATURES
- I AM NAVY MEDICINE
- NAVY MEDICINE IN FOCUS
- NEWS

For example, Groton, Connecticut is home to the Basic Enlisted Submarine School (BESS) where IDCs attend 58-weeks of instruction to include six-weeks of initial BESS training. In lieu of BESS, a corpsman selected to serve as a surface or dive IDC will attend a 12-week school in San Diego. Alternatively, special operations IDCs attend a 19-week school at Fort Bragg, North Carolina with four of those weeks spent in San Antonio, Texas learning special operations medical techniques.

"Being an IDC is one of the biggest rewards any hospital corpsman can hope to achieve. We are entrusted to care for some of the most talented and selfless men and women in our country. Our professionalism and quality of care has a direct impact on the health and well-being of our Navy and Marine Corps team," said Chief Hospital Corpsman Jeremy L. Simon, USS Leyte Gulf (CG 55) senior medical department representative.

U.S. Navy Medicine is a global health care network of 63,000 Navy medical personnel around the world who provide high quality health care to more than one million eligible beneficiaries. Navy Medicine personnel deploy with Sailors and Marines worldwide, providing critical mission support aboard ship, in the air, under the sea and on the battlefield.



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